THE CATHOLIC GEN-Z ON VIRTUAL EUCHARIST WITHIN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PONTIANAK

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ABSTRACT

Since the expiration of the Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement on 13 December 2022, The Catholic Church has also resumed in-person (offline) Eucharistic celebrations. Virtual Eucharistic celebrations continue in select parishes, particularly within the Archdiocese of Pontianak. This study examines how Catholic Generation Z (Gen-Z) individuals— a cohort inherently familiar with the virtual world—respond to virtual versus in-person Eucharistic celebrations. From the perspective of liturgical theology, the Eucharist should ideally be celebrated in person unless circumstances necessitate a virtual format. This study employs a quantitative approach with an online questionnaire sent via WhatsApp to 250 Catholic Generation Z respondents in several parishes. The results show that although offline Mass was rated as spiritually better, practical conditions made online Masses also preferred by the majority of respondents. This research provides insights for the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Pontianak in formulating pastoral approaches that better suit the spiritual and practical needs of Generation Z in the context of multicultural society of Pontianak.

Keywords: Catholic Generation Z; Virtual Eucharist; Archdiocese of Pontianak.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has the characteristics of glorifying freedom and personalization, depending on fast information, learning to innovate, and hyper technology (Kamil, 2018). Generation Z consumes much more of the internet than previous generations (Ali et al., 2020). Generation Z uses more than 20% of their spending to use telecommunications media such as financing internet data packages. They were born and live in a digital situation (Rastati, 2018). There are six main behaviours of Generation Z in Indonesia, namely: 1) Generation Z is the internetholic generation, a generation that uses the internet from an early age because they have lived since the internet developed; 2) Generation Z feels that with curiosity and tech-savvy, they can be successful in their careers; 3) Generation Z cares about the global situation, especially about social and environmental issues; 4) Generation Z's communication patterns tend to be visual rather than narration; 5) As consumers, Generation Z is critical. They are more emotional than functional; 6) Generation Z is also a consumer who prefers trends over discounts (Ali, 2022).

Generation Z, as a cohort highly familiar with social media, can also gain understanding or appreciation of the religious world through these platforms. In the context of Indonesian Catholicism, Widodo's research identifies social media accounts or channels utilized by both Church hierarchy and laity that serve as effective tools for catechesis (Widodo, 2022). Similarly, Doo's study in Central Papua indicates that young people can enhance their spiritual lives through information technology (Doo, 2024). This situation warrants further investigation, as the digital realm can engender impacts akin to virtual religion.

Campbell asserts that virtual religion has become a tangible reality in the present era. He further explains that digital religion represents a concept integrating technology and digital culture to produce religious practices. This fusion also yields broader understandings of the essence of reality and the wider world (Campbell & Bellar, 2022). Virtual and physical spaces form an integrated whole, albeit operating in parallel. This theory is advanced by Amnon and Birenboim in their research on young people using mobile phones or communication media, positing that virtual and physical spaces can coalesce into a unified realm that fosters various levels of rational efficacy (Amnon & Birenboim, 2024).

This study gains particular intrigue when examining virtual religion in the context of the Eucharist as specifically experienced by Generation Z. In particular, virtual Eucharistic celebrations, which continue to the present day, merit focused analysis. In March 2020, in Vatican News, Pope Francis held the Eucharistic celebration for the first time in the form of live streaming

using YouTube as the medium due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Catholic Church greatly appreciates advances in technology, especially technology in communications. Pope Paul VI, in Inter Mirifica, on December 4, 1963, argued that information technology is a good work and an amazing invention of human intelligence. This intelligence is a blessing and a gift from God in article 1 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1965). The Church has the right to use communication media to broadcast the message of salvation and to provide teaching on how humans can use the media properly in Inter Mirifica, article 3. All members of the Church are called to be able to make effective use of social communication media in various kinds of apostolic works in Inter Mirifica, article 13 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1965). Social communication media, digital artificial intelligence, and cyber networks bring changes in social, economic, political, and cultural connectivity from face-to-face to screen. The perspective on human interaction actually exists when it takes place virtual and wireless (Zis et al., 2021).

This work seeks to examine Generation Z's perspectives on experiencing the Eucharist in virtual formats. Specifically, the research is conducted within the Archdiocese of Pontianak, which encompasses a substantial Catholic population, including a significant proportion of Generation Z individuals. Notably, the Archdiocese hosts several Catholic higher education institutions, one of which specializes in the training of catechists. This context presents a compelling opportunity to investigate the impacts and understandings of virtual Masses among these groups. The study also explores the theological dimensions of the Eucharist to inform appropriate responses to virtual liturgies. The primary informants comprise university students, particularly those from Catholic institutions and those undergoing formation as catechists.

THE MEANING OF EUCHARIST FOR THE CATHOLICS.

The Eucharistic decree is the will of Jesus Christ himself (Martasudjita, 2008). The Eucharist becomes an expression of faith or a manifestation of faith in an order of worship to God. Basically, humans have *potential obedentialis*, a longing that exists within humans (Martasudjita, 2012a). This longing is *desiderium naturale* which means natural desire. The human longing is to be open to the Creator. The Eucharist is the highest sacrament because in it Christ the Lord Himself is presented, offered, and eaten, and through it, the Church always lives and evolves. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is a memory of the death and resurrection of the Lord. The Sacrifice of the Cross has been perpetuated throughout all ages as the pinnacle of all Christian worship and life. This sacrifice of the Cross becomes the source that signifies and produces the unity of the people of God and completes the building up of the Body of

Christ (Paulus II,Codex Iuris Canonici, 1983 canon 897).

The Eucharist is held as a common celebration and is attended by many people who actively participate. Every Eucharist is by its very nature official and public in Sacrosanctum Consilium, article 27 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1963). As a celebration, the presence of leaders and people must be real at the place where the Eucharist is held. The presence of the people has the meaning of togetherness. One of the main dimensions of the Catholic faith is the communal dimension where the manifestation of faith is carried out together. The Eucharist is the peak Sacrament of togetherness (Martasudjita, 2003). The Eucharist in its implementation requires the participation of the people. Participation is also a means that complements the Eucharist. The people are required to be involved in various roles, especially as liturgical officers. So in accordance with the provisions of Saint Benedict, the reason should be in harmony with sound or words (*mens concordet voci*)(Martasudjita, 2012). Through communion, people are considered to participate fully in the event of Christ's redemption which is remembered in the Eucharistic Prayer and received in the form of the Body and Blood of Christ Himself (Martasudjita, 2005). Theologically the Church in the sense of communion is the temple of God itself. Jesus only founded the Church in that sense(Suryanugraha, 2004). Nevertheless, the Church as a special building for worship originates from the ideals of the people who want the Holy Communion to be held specifically. So the church as a building is a place for sacramental encounters (Martasudjita, 2011).

THE GEN-Z AS INTERNET GENERATION

Generation Z is indeed an internet generation that spends a lot of time in cyberspace. Very few of them take advantage of technological advances in the field of information and communication to deepen their knowledge of religion and spirituality. Their curiosity about religion and spirituality is very low. Entertainment is the most preferred theme by the majority of Generation Z. Table 1 shows how Generation Z utilizes information technology in their daily lives. It also shows the data of the extent of their reliance on gadgets in everyday activities.

The data indicate that Generation Z exhibits a strong affinity for utilizing social media platforms. Many among them possess more than one gadget, employing these platforms primarily for entertainment or information acquisition. This aligns with research by Hidayah and Anshar (2025), who found that Generation Z generally uses social media to obtain information pertinent to education, careers, and personal needs. Corroborating this, Devi

et al. (2024) reported that Generation Z leverages social media to seek content related to health, education, entertainment, and religion.

Table 1.
Age, education, electronic devices, duration of internet access, and themes

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Age.	14-16 years	7	2.8 %
		17-23 years	232	92.8 %
		24-27 years	11	4.4 %
2.	The current level of education.	S2	1	0.4 %
		D4/S1	224	89.6 %
		SMA/SMK	20	8.0 %
		SMP	5	2.0 %
3.	The number of gadgets owned.	1	157	62.8 %
		2	82	32.8 %
		3	10	4.0 %
		>3	1	0.4 %
4.	Duration to access the internet.	0-4 hours per day	41	16.4 %
		5-9 hours per day	114	45.6 %
		10-14 hours per day	62	24.8 %
		15-19 hours per day	22	8.8 %
		20-24 hours per day	11	4.4 %
5.	Most liked theme.	Entertainment	94	37.6 %
		Communication, information	34	13.6 %
		Science, technology	27	10.8 %
		Sports, automotive	19	7.6 %
		Education, teaching	15	6.0 %
		Religion, spirituality	15	6.0 %
		Horror, mystic	12	4.8 %
		Social politics	7	2.8 %
		Health, medicine	5	2.0 %
		Economics, finance	5	2.0 %
		Other themes	17	6.8 %

A notable finding is the limited utilization of social media by this cohort for engaging with religious content. In this regard, virtual masses represent a religious practice conducted in a virtual environment via live streaming or recorded broadcasts, constituting religious content. This study further examines Generation Z's perceptions of virtual masses within their daily lives. Specifically, the initial data analysis investigates whether virtual masses constitute content they actively follow amid their social media usage. A key

limitation of these data is the insufficient in-depth exploration of the specific religious content that has attracted or been accessed by Generation Z.

Table 2.
Virtual space and online communication

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Virtual space is real space.	Yes	111	44.4 %
		No	90	36.0 %
		Unsure	49	19.6 %
2.	Online relationships can replace offline relationships.	Yes	163	65.2 %
		No	71	28.4 %
		Unsure	16	6.4 %

Table 2 indicates that the majority of Generation Z perceives virtual space as a tangible reality. The relationships formed in the online world are capable of substituting for authentic, real-world connections. These two statements aim to explore Generation Z's paradigm regarding virtual environments and the relational dynamics within them. Hornsby (1991) argues that in the digital era, technology offers distinct forms of relationships and relational situations. Other studies reveal that virtual connections can influence an individual's life and perceptions in the digital realm. Turkle (1997) posits that identity emerges from the objects one observes and engages with; thus, virtual space—as an observed and inhabited object—enables more pluralistic and flexible identities. The findings in the table above indirectly confirm these theories. A potential implication is that Generation Z may view Virtual Eucharist as a viable substitute for physical Eucharist.

THE INCONSISTENCY OF GEN-Z TO PARTICIPATE EUCHARIST

The work suggests that Catholic Generation Z individuals have the desire to affirm their identity as Catholics who have already participated in receiving Holy Communion. Table 3 examines their situation in attending Eucharistic celebrations, both online and offline. However, the data shows that there is an inconsistency of Generation Z Catholics in changing from offline participation to online participation in Eucharistic celebrations. Generation Z has been known as the digital generation. They have gadgets. They can access everything online easily. Their participation in the Eucharist from before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out until when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out has decreased. Even though during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Eucharistic celebration was carried out online. This is completely contrary to

the researchers' assumption that Catholic Generation Z participation in the online Eucharist would increase. Of course, there must be other factors that influence the decline in Catholic Generation Z participation in the Eucharist from offline to online.

Table 3.
Catholicism

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Duration of being a Catholic.	< 5 years	16	6.4 %
		5-10 years	8	3.2 %
		11-16 years	12	4.8 %
		17-23 years	201	80.4 %
		24-28 years	13	5.2 %
2.	Participation in Holy Communion.	Yes	247	98.8 %
		Not yet	3	1.2 %
3.	Frequency of participation in the Eucharist before the Covid-19 pandemic.	Once a week	149	59.6 %
		> Once a week	52	20.8 %
		Once in two weeks	4	1.6 %
		Once a month	2	0.8 %
		Uncertain	43	17.2 %
4.	The Eucharist before the Covid-19 pandemic.	Weekly	145	58.0 %
		Daily	3	1.2 %
		Daily and weekly	36	14.4 %
		Uncertain	66	26.4 %
5.	Frequency of participation in the Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Once a week	145	58.0 %
		> Once a week	15	6.0 %
		Once in two weeks	7	2.8 %
		Once a month	3	1.2 %
		Uncertain	80	32.0 %
6.	The Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Weekly	149	59.6 %
		Daily	4	1.6 %
		Daily and weekly	15	6.0 %
		Uncertain	82	32.8 %
7.	Participation in the Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Decreased	127	50.8 %
		Mediocre	69	27.6 %
		Increased	26	10.4 %
		Very decreased	22	8.8 %
		Very increased	6	2.4 %

Wibowo and Fauzi (2024) note that some parishioners prefer offline Masses because they experience greater reverence and tranquillity. Jehaman and

Firmanto (2021) further explain that parishioners' limited understanding of online Eucharist discourages their participation in virtual Masses. The Church's response to the COVID-19 situation should affirm that the Eucharist remains validly celebrated, serving as a manifestation of the Church's presence for its isolated members.

Table 4 reveals compelling findings: the majority of respondents assert that in-person or offline Masses (Eucharistic celebrations) are far superior, owing to a more tangible sense of God's presence, the direct reception of Holy Communion, the profound fellowship experienced in face-to-face encounters, the more sacred symbolism and atmosphere, and the ability to participate directly in the Eucharist. Most respondents maintain that virtual Eucharistic celebrations cannot substitute for face-to-face ones. A minority, however, contend that virtual Eucharist can serve as a viable alternative.

Table 4.
Online Eucharist and offline Eucharist

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Comparison between offline Eucharist and online Eucharist.	Offline is better than online	221	88.4 %
		Online is as good as offline	20	8.0 %
		Online is better than offline	9	3.6 %
2.	The advantages of offline Eucharist.	God's presence	93	37.2 %
		The Holy Communion	54	21.6 %
		Encounter with people	42	16.8 %
		Sacred symbols and atmosphere	33	13.2 %
		Direct participation	28	10.2 %
3.	The advantages of online Eucharist.	The efficiency of time, effort, and cost	93	37.2 %
		Silence, serenity	84	33.6 %
		God's presence	31	12.4 %
		The sacred atmosphere at home	24	9.6 %
		The salvation effect can be felt	18	7.2 %
4.	Online Eucharistic celebrations can replace offline Eucharistic celebrations.	Yes	99	39.6 %
		No	122	48.8 %
		Unsure	29	11.6 %

The primary advantages of virtual Eucharist, as identified by the majority, include: (1) efficiency in time, energy, and cost; and (2) enhanced silence and tranquillity. Nevertheless, regarding the perception of God's presence, far

more respondents report experiencing it in offline Eucharist than in online formats. In this regard, respondents understand true Eucharist to occur only in direct, physically enabling circumstances.

Appiah-Kubi posits that the dimension of "*transubstantiatio*" constitutes the real change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (Appiah-Kubi, 2021). This dimension serves as a sign of God's direct presence in the Eucharistic celebration. Lebenek maintains that, according to Catholic doctrine, the Eucharist essentially occurs in a real, immediate context, for two primary reasons: first, the tangible experience of Christ's presence in the Body and Blood through direct Communion; and second, the authentic community formed through physical encounter (Lebenek, 2014). Nevertheless, Lebenek personally advocates openness to virtual Eucharist, viewing it as a viable option for those unable to participate in a direct celebration. This perspective aligns with Sihombing et al. (2023), who recommend that virtual Eucharist be maintained, particularly for the elderly or the sick who cannot attend in person.

EUCHARISTIC PASTORAL PRACTICES AS AN ALTERNATIVE

Online Mass, which is also a government suggestion, has become a new experience in worship during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, many things do not meet the elements of the Eucharist optimally (Situmorang, 2020). *First*, the sacramental dimension, Mass will only be valid if led by a valid leader (a priest who is ordained in the Catholic rite), carried out by liturgical rites in the Catholic Church, and provided with valid material and form, namely bread and wine. However, in practice, apart from the absence of the people who were directly present, the sacramental communion of the people through the reception of Holy Communion did not occur. *Second*, the spiritual dimension, according to the Council of Trent, there are three ways of receiving Holy Communion namely, sacramentally, spiritually, and both directly. In the Covid-19 situation receiving holy communion is implemented only spiritually so that the union between the people and Christ continues. *Third*, the communal dimension, the communion between the priest and the people in a live-streaming Mass situation still occurs, although not sacramentally. People can still form domestic churches by building fellowship with their families. Mark 5:25-34, which tells the story of a woman who suffered from bleeding and experienced healing by touching Jesus' robe because of her strong belief, can be an analogy for online Masses, which, although there is a distance between the people and the sacramental actions, online Masses are still valid (Viktorahadi & Busro, 2021).

Virtual Masses also have a spiritual impact on people who celebrate them with strong faith (Cornelius, 2022). The Catholic Church decided on a virtual Mass as an alternative during the Covid-19 pandemic. In his research, Sule stated that 89% of 169 people were dissatisfied with the online mass policy, especially because they could not receive communion in person. This situation can lead to a degradation of understanding and appreciation of the efficacy of the sacrament as a means and sign of salvation in the Church. Online Masses cannot answer the spiritual needs of the people (Sule, 2021). because naturally, the Mass is a physical presence (*in persona*). Catholics are concerned about the Catholic Church's policy regarding holding online Masses (Viktorahadi, 2021). The celebration of the Eucharist as a perfect sacramental act, especially in the part of the union between Christ and the people in holy communion, cannot come about in online or live-streaming Masses.

In general, the Generation Z individuals in the Archdiocese of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, are also digital generation or internet generation. They have spent most of their time accessing cyberspace. Their attachment or interest in the virtual world is what makes them think that the virtual world is part of the real world. They can no longer differentiate between the virtual world and the real world, so they assume that relationships in the virtual world can replace relationships in the real world. In the context of religiosity, they still feel confused and doubtful about whether the online worship can replace the offline one. Basically they know that the offline Eucharistic celebrations still have more advantages than the online ones. They have opined that there are five main reasons why the offline Eucharist is better. They are God's presence, The Holy Communion, encounter with people, sacred symbols and atmosphere, and direct participation. Conversely, they have captured the benefits of online Eucharist in just three practical ways. They are time, physical energy and cost effectiveness. In terms of time, they do not need much time to prepare to attend the Eucharistic celebration. In terms of physical energy, they only need to move from room to room in the same house so they don't need to expend much physical energy. In terms of costs, they do not incur any transportation costs for traveling from home to the church location. They don't need to bother thinking about transportation costs which are quite expensive for their financial condition.

The dilemma between spiritual and practical issues faced by generation Z Catholics needs to be addressed with appropriate pastoral approach. In fact, these two issues are not contradictory to each other because each issue requires a different pastoral approach. Spiritual problems need to be addressed with a theological pastoral approach, while practical problems

need to be addressed with a practical pastoral approach. Theological pastoral approach related to teaching and living the faith. In this approach, the Catholic Church needs to take action in the form of cultivating the faith of young people. Practical pastoral approach is concerned with solving practical problems such as social and economic problems. These two approaches are actually inseparable because they can influence each other. As there are two different approaches, there are two kinds of pastoral action, namely pastoral action from a theological perspective and pastoral action from a practical perspective. Theological pastoral actions are useful to help generation Z Catholics to increasingly believe in their faith in the real presence of Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist, while practical pastoral action is useful to help Generation Z Catholics overcome practical problems related to living out their faith.

In the context of spiritual problems of Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, some theological pastoral actions that need to be taken by Catholic Church. First, teaching them the truth of faith about the uniqueness of God's real presence in offline Eucharistic celebrations which are completely different from online ones. The communal dimension of the Catholic faith is a key aspect where believers practice their faith together. The Eucharist is the highest point of the Sacrament of community (Martasudjita, 2003). Participating in the Eucharist in person and celebrating it collectively will enhance its perfection. Second, opening their insights into the meaning of the Eucharist as a banquet. The Eucharist as a banquet must be attended by the invitees in person in the banquet hall. In this world, there has never been a banquet held online. Third, elucidating to them that the Catholic Church is a community of believers. The encounter between believers is a fundamental requirement in the celebration of the Eucharist. According to Martasudjita (2005), by taking part in communion, individuals are seen as actively engaging in Christ's act of redemption as depicted in the Eucharistic Prayer and received in the physical form of Christ's Body and Blood. Acknowledgment of the presence of Christ's body and blood is also evident in His reception during the act of communion. Forth, emphasizing to them that direct involvement and participation as readers of Scripture, psalm singers, choir members, altar servers and others in the celebration of the Eucharist is inseparable aspects of God's work of salvation. The participation of the faithful in liturgical celebrations is mentioned in Sacrosanctum Concilium No. 30 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1963). There should be a conversation between the priest and the congregation during the acclamation, antiphon, and the beauty of the eucharist found in the actions of both.

In the context of practical problems of Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, some practical pastoral actions need to be taken by Catholic Church. First, discussing with them about the characteristics of offline relationships such as personal touch, emotional atmosphere, involvement and others that are not present in online relationships so that offline relationships cannot be simply replaced by online relationships. Second, informing them that participating in an online Eucharistic celebration can only be justified if they are experiencing an urgent situation that prevents them from attending the Eucharistic celebration in Church such as Covid-19 pandemic. Eucharistic celebrations broadcasted live online are only for those who are unable to attend due to physical limitations and health issues. Third, giving them a comprehension that participating in offline Eucharistic celebrations can help them focus more on the mystery of God's presence and they will not be distracted by offers of pleasure in cyberspace. Forth, motivating them to be willing to take part in the sacrifice of Jesus by sacrificing their time, energy, and costs to attend the Eucharistic celebration in the Church. Helping each other by giving rides to Church is also part of the sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z in the Archdiocese of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, possesses a direct understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist. They participate in online Eucharistic celebrations solely due to practical necessities. This reveals a disparity between their spiritual comprehension—that they require the Eucharist in person—and the practical circumstances compelling virtual participation. They face a tension between spiritual and practical elements. On one side, in terms of spirituality they have a mature faith. They have believed and felt the presence of God in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrament. They feel the concrete presence of God when they receive and eat Holy Communion. For this reason, they firmly argue that online Eucharistic celebrations spiritually cannot replace offline Eucharistic celebrations. But on the other hand, from a practical point of view, they have experienced the benefits of online Eucharistic celebrations. Time, energy and cost effectiveness can be achieved in online Eucharistic celebrations. Online Eucharistic Celebration really helps them to reduce expenses for transportation which is quite expensive for them. Means of transportation in their place is also still relatively rare.

However, in a digital situation, they experience many temptations. When entering the digital world, what they are looking for online shows are those that are not related to religion and spirituality. Thus, their biggest challenge

during online Eucharistic celebrations is that they prefer to seek entertainment rather than attend mass. This is what causes a decrease in attendance and participation at online masses. Under these conditions, it is very important for them to learn that the Eucharist is closely related to sacrifice. The church needs to emphasize to Generation Z the meaning of sacrifice in the Eucharist, including the sacrifice of time, energy and costs. The sacrifice must be made based on self-awareness and sincerity. To follow up on this research, the researchers propose a research theme on the appreciation of Generation Z on the meaning of sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist. This research aims of course to see how Generation Z is able to sacrifice themselves completely for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In general, this study provides two contributions. The first contribution is to reveal the reality of the problems faced by Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese. They experience hesitation in determining their attitude towards the problems they are facing. The second contribution is to offer solutions to the problems faced by Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese in the form of theological and practical pastoral actions. The limitation of this study is that the scope of the study only covers Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, so the conclusions and proposed pastoral actions of the study may not necessarily apply elsewhere. This study exclusively employed a descriptive quantitative method, which has the limitation of not incorporating direct perspectives, such as those obtained through interviews. Consequently, the research lacks depth in exploring the arguments or information provided by the informants. Researchers only determine the form of theological and practical pastoral actions without determining how these actions are realized.

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